

NSC BRIEFING

22 DECEMBER 1955

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FRENCH ELECTIONS

- I. Campaign for 2 Jan '56 elections being marked by increased registrations, quickening tempo.
  - A. Over 1,200,000 new voters registered.
  - B. Candidates are drawing record crowds at record number rallies.
  - C. Poll indicates more Frenchmen than ever before intend to vote (88% of electorate compared with 80% in '51).
- II. Basically, a three-cornered race, which reduces possibility of elections producing stable majority: the three majors are--
  - A. Communists, who are playing up worker solidarity, pressing for left government.
    1. Confident this time that "alliance" mechanism--which worked against them in 1951--will be unable to deprive them of seats in proportion to their popular strength.

2. 21 Dec estimate reported by Embassy:  
PCF will gain 35-40 seats, for  
total about 135 of 596 (30 Algerian  
seats will not be filled now) at  
stake.

B. Mendes-France Republican Front (coalition of Socialists, most Radicals and minority of ex-Gaullists), is attacking Right-Center "stagnation," advocating parliamentary, electoral reform to strengthen French executive.

1. Republican Front hopes to win protest vote (usually given to Communists), and youth vote.

2. Front expected to win about 150 seats.

C. Third major group is Faure-Pinay coalition (includes Popular Republicans, a bloc made up of Independents, Peasants and most ex-Gaullists, and also those right-wing Radicals who have split from Mendes).

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1. 1 s group is playing up current prosperity, promise of higher living standards; also aiming at youth by advocating cut in military service.
2. Faure-Pinay group may win close to 300 seats of 596 total. Nevertheless, little likelihood of stable coalition.

III. Among smaller splinters are anti-tax rightists (Poujadists) who are running negative campaign against both Mendes and Faure candidates.

- A. Their activity responsible for some violence so far.

IV. Contest between Mendes and Faure-Pinay blocs confused by fact that both blocs include wide spectrum of views, yet share basic ideology (differing mostly on method).

- A. Formal platforms similar: only clear-cut issue separating them is state aid for church schools (Mendes opposes).

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1. Mendes-France attempting create foreign affairs issue by attack on Pinay for accepting 19 Dec NATO Council statement on Soviet Middle East tactics.

V. Both Pinay and Mendes pessimistic:

- A. Pinay fears loss of votes to anti-tax rightists, thus forcing use of proportional representation in many areas (which will help Communists).
- B. Mendes-France's private opinion of Republican Front chances is only about 150 seats. ~~(Mendes-France's forecast)~~

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